UNITED NATIONS

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL

Distr.: GENERAL

E/ECA/PSD.5/32
15 January 1988

Original: ENGLISH

ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR AFRICA

Fifth session of the Joint Conference of African Planners. Statisticians and Demographers

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 21-28 March 1988

LC/NAIROBI

REPORT ON PADIS ACTIVITIES (1986-1987), EXAMINATION OF WORK PROGRAMME (1988-1989) AND CONSIDERATION OF DRAFT WORK PROGRAMME (1990-1991)

A. PADIS activities (1986-1987)

1. During the biennium the Pan-African Documentation and Information System expanded both its system of data bases related to socio-economic development in Africa and its network of institutions in Africa contributing to and utilizing the system. It mounted training and rendered advisory services to member States on the establishment and maintenance of development information systems.

Data Base Development

2. More than 1700 records were added to the PADDEV bibliographic data base on socio-economic development, bringing the total to nearly 7,000 references. Staff members undertook missions to train documentalists in Togo and Botswana for the preparation of national indexes and, as a result, the volumes DEVINDEX-Togo and DEVINDEX-Botswana were printed. The fourteenth issue of DEVINDEX-Africa was issued. In 1987 a new format for DEVINDEX was developed: three trimestrial issues were produced and delivered to subscribers in an inexpensive and quickly published format; a fourth was prepared as an annual cumulative index in a higher quality format meant for sustained use. PADIS-STAT, the Pan-African Statistical Data Bank, jointly produced by PADIS and the ECA Statistics Division, now contains more than 160,000 statistical time series over the period 1970-1986.

3. Major revisions were undertaken of the PADIS-TCDC directory of African experts data base, with new data collection forms designed and distributed; more than 600 new entries were added in the period. In addition, PADIS worked on two other experts data bases: a data base of experts at ECA-sponsored institutions and, in co-operation with the ECA Personnel Section, a data base of selected experts for short and long-term assignments at ECA.

4. Work was started on new PADIS data bases on development institutions and on development research in Africa. In conjunction with both these data bases, PADIS entered in a co-operative arrangement with the East and Southern Africa Universities Research Project, whose headquarters are in Dar es Salaam.

5. PADIS continued to acquire and update complementary data bases produced by other organizations. These data bases, which are accessible online, are used to prepare the Selective Dissemination of Information (SDI) service to subscribers. These included: LABORDOC (produced by ILO), containing over 24,000 records; INTIB (UNIDO), with over 14,000 records; DEVSIS-CANADA (IDRC), with over 6,000 records; DIS (UNDIESA), with over 6,000 records, AGRIS (FAO), with more than 20,000 records and POP-IN produced by the ECA Population Division.

Services to Users

6. PADIS launched three services during the period to deliver information to users of the system to whom online access was not available: a PADIS quarterly newsletter, giving news of the system as well as other items of interest related to development information in Africa, was initiated in 1986. Eight issues were published, in English and French. A Selective Dissemination of Information (SDI) service was also started in 1986 to channel new items of interest on a semi-annual basis to planners, decision makers and researchers, according to their individual profiles. All the bibliographic data bases installed at PADIS were used to run this system, which presently has 57 subscribers. Additionally, a Question/Answer service was initiated whereby individualized responses are prepared to queries on African development, using bibliographic, statistical and referral data bases,

7. Online access to all PADIS data bases was provided to users at ECA, ILO, UNDP, and OAU offices in Addis Ababa. Negotiations are underway to extend online access to users at several government offices in Addis Ababa. To facilitate online use, a menu-driven format was designed and installed, adding new data bases for users (ECA telephone directory, ECA news, ECA resolutions). Problems related to telecommunications infrastructure in the region such as the high cost of connections continue to impede provision of online access to PADIS network users outside Addis Ababa. However, access has been facilitated by installation of data bases on magnetic media, including tape and diskettes. Statistical data bases were installed on tape in Algeria, Benin, Morocco and Tunisia, and on diskette for a national planning ministry outside the Africa region. Training courses in the utilization and maintenance of the data bases were held in conjunction with all of the above installations.

8. A major advance in online access was facilitated with the advent of the Addis-New York-Geneva Alternate Voice-Data (AVD) line in 1987. At the end of the biennium, plans had been prepared to allow data communication between the ECA HP 3000/58 computer at PADIS and the IBM computer at Headquarters/New York. Once the linkage is made, ECA users will have access to data bases at UN Headquarters in New York and Geneva.

9. In addition PADIS developed the following user services and products:

What is PADIS brochure/response card: In 1987 PADIS issued a brochure and response card (for those desiring more information or follow-up action) on the PADIS system and network, with concentration on how users can avail themselves of PADIS services.

Missions on user services: PADIS delivered a mission on the development of user services to Cape Verde. The possibilities for user services development will be a major topic in the workshop to take place in Gambia 11-15 January 1988.

Study of user needs: In order to better meet user needs, PADIS has engaged a consultant to study information utilization problems in three African countries. It is expected to be completed in 1988.

10. PADIS stayed in touch with developments in data base management software applications by attending MINISIS and CDS/ISIS user group meetings and by having several staff members undergo training in CDS/ISIS. The latter is particularly useful in downloading data from minicomputers to microcomputers and thus greatly increasing the accessibility of PADIS data bases to member States.

Training personnel at African documentation centres

11. National seminars to train national documentation personnel were held in Ethiopia (two seminars). in Seychelles for participants from Mauritius and the Seychelles, in Gambia, and, on a subregional level. for East and Southern Africa (two seminars, one with special reference to indexing, abstracting and building authority files) and for Central and Great Lakes Region. In addition to the training in PADIS-STAT mentioned above, in cooperation with the ECA Statistics Division PADIS conducted, jointly with the ECA Statistics Division, a regional workshop for participants from 15 countries in Francophone Africa on the utilization and maintenance of the statistical data base. PADIS and the Statistics Division also jointly mounted a workshop on the use of statistical software packages for statisticians and government planners from Anglophone African countries.

National Participating Centres

12. Five countries designated national centres for participation as focal points in the PADIS network in 1987, bringing the total to 16 African countries which have done so. The countries now include:

Algeria
Benin
Botswana
Cape Verde
Central African Republic
Ethiopia
Gambia
Guinea
Malawi
Mauritius
Morocco
Niger
Sudan
Seychelles
Togo
Zaire

A letter has been prepared for the signature of the Executive Secretary urging those countries which have not done so to name as soon as possible a national focal point.

13. National participating centres received a variety of technical assistance, including installation of data bases (see supra), advisory services. fellowships and training. In this regard. advisory services were rendered to Burkina Faso, Djibouti, Malawi, Somalia, Sudan. Swaziland and Zambia. training mounted for Ethiopia and fellowships granted to Benin and Tanzania for training at PADIS. PADIS also participated in a workshop on the establishment of a national information and documentation system in Botswana.

14. Agreements were signed and site preparation undertaken for PADIS subregional centres for East and Southern Africa in Lusaka (ESADIS) and in West Africa in Niamey (WADIS). The Meeting of Plenipotentiaries from Gisenyi and Yaounde-based MULPOCs which was held in Addis Ababa from 10-11 April 1987 decided to accept the offer of the Government of Zaire to hose CADIS which covers both the Central African and Great Lakes countries. An interim arrangement has been made with the Arab League Documentation Centre (ALDOC) to house NADIS for a period of three years. In this regard PADIS worked closely with the Arab League Documentation ALDOC in the establishment of the Arab Information System Network (ARISNET) which will serve inter alia nine African member States.

15. A major extension of the PADIS network occurred with the establishment. in January 1987. of the Standing Committee on the Harmonization and Standardization of Documentation and Information at ECA-sponsored Institutions. including ECOWAS (SCOHSDIS). While the Committee will hold its first meeting of the whole in February 1988, preparatory meetings have already taken place. Through the Committee PADIS hopes to add the data bases of participating institutions to its PADIS-COM files and thus make them available throughout the network.

16. PADIS continued to service the meetings of the Regional Technical Committee, which held its second and third meetings in 1986 and 1987. At the ECA Conference of Ministers meeting in Addis Ababa in 1987, it was decided to hold the meetings of all subsidiary organs of the ECA. including the RTC, biennially. Thus, the RTC will not meet this year. However, it should be noted that the present meeting. as designated by ECA resolution 498 (XIX), is charged with proposing to the ECA Conference of Ministers which will meet in Niamey in April 1988 five member States which will designate their representatives to the Regional Technical Committee.

17. PADIS also rendered assistance to institutional participating centres, undertaking an advisory services mission

to the Sahel Institute in Bamako to strengthen co-operative arrangements with the Reseau Sahelien d'information et de documentation scientifique et technique (RESADOC) and participating in the Third ECA/Association of African Universities Conference on Vice-Chancellors, Presidents and Rectors of Institutions of Higher Learning in Africa held in Harare as well as the meeting convened by the African Regional Standards Organization (ARSO) to development an Africa regional standards information network. At the request of UNCTAD and UNDP, PADIS participated in the evaluation of the West African System for Automated Customs Data (ASYCUDA). PADIS also. jointly with the ECA Natural Resources Division, designed a project document for submission to UNDP to strengthen the information and documentation service of the Kagera River Basin Organization (KBO).

18. Frequent collaboration was maintained with UNESCO and the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) in planning strategies for information systems development in Africa. PADIS undertook a major trans-African mission to promote South-South co-operation in information systems development in collaboration with IDRC and the Arab League Documentation System (ALDOC), the aim of which was to encourage twinning arrangements between Sub-Saharan and North African institutions in the field of development information. PADIS maintained a close working relationship also with the United Nations Advisory Council for the Co-ordination of Information Systems (ACCIS) whose headquarters are in Geneva.

B. Examination of work programme (1988-1989)

19. In the 1988-1989 work programme the operational activities of PADIS fall under subprogramme 7 and 8 of the major programme on Development Issues and Policies. They concentrate on data base development, central co-ordination and information exchange services and national and subregional information and documentation services, continuing to address the issue of strengthening the information provision and dissemination capabilities of member states.

20. Under subprogramme 7.1, Development and maintenance of bibliographic data bases on social. economic and technological issues, PADIS will deliver to the Regional Technical Committee in 1989 a survey of user needs, produce two annual issues of DEVINDEX-AFRICA, including information of women in development; continue its service of Selective Dissemination of Information to government planners, policy-makers, researchers and managers and issue a manual for bibliographic description to be used by national participating centres. PADIS will also deliver references on development information on magnetic media for national and institutional participating centres. Microfiche delivery services will continue to be provided to national participating centres.

The programme will also continue its Question/Answer Service to member States, begun in 1987.

21. Under subprogramme 7.2 which calls for development and maintenance of a referral data base of African experts, development institutions and ongoing projects, a number of technical publications will be issued. These include two issues each of the Directory of African Experts, the Directory of Development Projects in Africa and the Directory of Development Institutions in Africa. Each of these data bases will be available upon request to national. subregional and regional participating centres on magnetic media. The project will also provide referral services on the basis of these data bases.

22. Under its training programme for personnel of African documentation and information centres (subprogramme 7.3), PADIS will produce two technical publications: a manual for PADIS national participating centres and guidelines on the marketing of information products. Its operational activities will include six training courses in PADIS methodolodologies for staff of national participating centres and two regional seminars for users of PADIS data bases.

23. Under the subprogramme on management of the PADIS Central Co-ordinating Office, the outputs will include reports to the Joint Conference of African Planners, Statisticians and Demographers on the use of microcomputers in information/documentation centres centres in Africa and servicing of the Informatics Committee of the present meeting as well as the 1989 meeting of the PADIS Regional Technical Committee. The PADIS newsletter will continue to be issued quarterly in English and French throughout the biennium.

24. As part of its subprogramme to strengthen national and subregional information and documentation services. PADIS will report annually to the ECA Conference of Ministers on the implementation of the PADIS project, as well as to the legislative organs on the establishment of PADIS subregional centres. Under operational activities. technical co-operation activities will take place in member states for the establishment of national PADIS participating centres. including four advisory mission to national, subregional and regional PADIS participating centres. PADIS will also organize a meeting of heads of national, subregional and regional PADIS participating centres.

C. Draft work programme (1990-1991)

25. None of tne units of the United Nations secretariat have yet prepared work programmes for 1990-1991 for the reason that the General Assembly decided to extend the Medium-term Plan for 1984-1989 to the period 1990-1991 as an exceptional measure to

permit full participation of member States in the preparation of the next medium-term plan (by General Assembly resolution 41/213). Thus. the third revision of the current medium term-plan which will serve as the framework for the formulation of the proposed programme is to be submitted to the General Assembly for approval in 1988. Once it is approved the work programme and budget for 1990-1991 will then be drawn up.

26. While PADIS thus cannot present its draft work programme for the forthcoming biennium. it can proffer its draft third revised medium term plan for 1984-1989 to cover the period 1990-1991. In this revision PADIS has proposed the addition of two new sub-programmes to the major programme Development Issues and Policies in Africa, viz., Subprogramme 7, Electronic Word and Data Processing Services for the ECA Secretariat and Subprogramme 8, Information Systems Development and User Services. The reasons for the first subprogramme are as follows:

27. Within most of the United Nations system. the electronic data processing services and information systems are part of the same organizational structure. This is notably the case at Headquarters in New York. However, at ECA, the subprogrammes for EDP services and for information systems have been scattered under different major programmes: the former under Administration and Common Services and the latter under Development Issues and Policies. By bringing the two closely-related services together as subsequent subprogrammes (7 and 8) under Development Issues and Policies, a more rational and efficient use of resources can be achieved to provide more effective management and delivery of information systems to the secretariat as well as to African member States. This will also permit close co-operation between these services and system and the recently-established Technological Innovations Board. ECA made this suggestion for re-organization of these subprogrammes in the context of the Review of the Economic and Social. including Humanitarian Sectors, of the United Nations and Streamlining of the Secretariat.

28. The legislative authority, objectives, problem address and strategy for proposed subprogramme 7 are:

(a) Legislative authority

29. The legislative authority for this programme is Commission resolution 600 (XXII).

(b) Objectives

To provide electronic word and data processing services for all needed computer applications in the ECA secretariat, to maintain computer facilities, and to train inhouse users in the utilization of available facilities.

(c) Problem addressed

While other United Nations secretariats have automated their data and word processing needs for substantive activities, financial, personnel, other administrative and management services and have thereby increased tremendously their productivity. lack of resources has prevented ECA from modernizing its computer system, resulting in low productivity. As a result ECA lags far behind other offices of the United Nations in its computer facilities and office automation. Thus, it is important that special attention be given to the ECA electronic word and data processing services during this biennium in order to bring it to the level of similar services at other United Nations offices.

(d) Strategy

In the period 1990-1991, the following will be undertaken: Provision of microcomputers to stand alone, to operate in local area networks (LANs) and/or be linked to the mainframe central processing unit. to staff (both professional and general services) in substantive divisions as well as in the administrative and other management services; continued provision of access to ECA of other United Nations system data bases; increased exchange of data and information with the rest of the United Nations system through the data transmission network, in conjunction with the ECA training section. training of in-house users in microcomputer utilization and applications: advisory services to ECA substantive divisions and administration on equipment purchase to ensure maximal price performance and compatability with ECA and the rest of the United Nations system, development and maintenance of operating systems, data bases and applications software; provision of technical assistance programming support services to ECA substantive divisions: maintenance of the ECA mailing list; scheduling and monitoring of the maintenance of system hardware; and design and development of utility programmes and new applications to offer improved planning, control and forecasting systems to end users.

Subprogramme 8

30. The second subprogramme proposed by PADIS is Subprogramme 8 under Development Issues and Policies in Africa, Information Systems Development and User Services. It has been proposed for the following reasons.

31. Two new subprogrammes were added to the 1984 Revision to the Medium-Term Plan for the Period 1984-1989, subprogrammes 7 and 8 under programme 3, Development issues and policies and Africa. These subprogrammes - 7 Central Co-ordination and Information Exchange Services and 8 - National and Subregional Information and Documentation Services - contained the essential elements of the proposed subprogramme on information systems and users

services, but lacked exposition of an overall focus and orientation. The proposed subprogramme 8 conbines these two former subprogrammes within the overall focus of information systems and user services, as mandated by ECA resolution 600 (XXII). The call for continuing improved information flows by UNPAAERD also signaled the need for a focussed subprogramme in information systems.

32. This new subprogramme 8 thus replaces the former subprogrammes 7 and 8 under programme 3, Development issues and policies in Africa. Its legislative authority, objectives, problem address and strategy for the period 1990-1991 follow.

(a) Legislative authority:

The legislative authority for this programme is Commission resolutions 359 (XIV); 438(XVII); 469(XVIII); 498(XIX). 534(XX); 581(XXI) and 600 (XXII).

(b) Objectives

The objective of this subprogramme is to respond to the needs of member States for reliable. accessible information on aspects of economic and social development in Africa by creating a series of numeric and non-numeric data bases for storage and dissemination; to assist member States, subregional and regional institutions in the development and use of information systems and to promote the exchange of information among member States in the context of technical co-operation.

(c) Problem addressed

Member States need immediate access to national and comparative data on economic and social development for planning and decision making. Frequently, the necessary information exists in Government offices or in offices of international organizations, but is not available/accessible to end users (Government planners, decision makers) at the time of need. African information and documentation infrastructure lags sadly behind the region's pressing needs for development information. For decades, the information area has been neglected, and, as a result, the vital role which information plays as an input to and output from every area of human endeavour was neglected. Information, properly organized and managed. is a pre-requisite to Africa's self-reliant development.

Specifically, the major problems hindering the efficient organization of information and the smooth delivery of information services at the national level in Africa are: the absence, in most cases. of national information policy and policy-making organs; the scarcity of human, material and financial resources; the lack of awareness on the part of users of the availability

and accessibility of data, and the reluctance on the part of users to seek out information/data for use in planning and decision making; the inadequacy of training facilities; the severe shortage of middle level specialists and technicians; the low status accorded to information personnel; the paucity of training opportunities in modern information handling techniques; the use of outdated methods of information processing, storage and dissemination; and the low priority given to information systems and services in national development plans. Use of incompatible information collection and classification methods, and poor communication mechanisms have hampered inter-country exchange of development information and experience.

(d) Strategy for the period 1990-1991

Activities under this subprogramme are of a continuing nature. During this period the following will be undertaken:

- Advisory services on formulation of national information policy and the establishment and strengthening of national documentation centres and linkages with the PADIS network;

- Development of user services to encourage utilization of the network through development of innovative information products and training of users;

- Training of staff of national, subregional and regional institutions in network utilization;

- Processing of economic and social data in data bases, and acquisition of data bases from commercial and non-commercial sources;

- Training of staff of national and subregional documentation centres and regional institutions in harmonization of standards and methodologies;

- Horizontal co-operation in the continuing exchange of information;

- Provision of direct access to PADIS data bases to participating national and subregional centres and regional institutions;

- Strengthening subregional centres by improving linkages with national centres for the exchange of data; and

- Publication at regular intervals of selected data base contents and delivery of other hardcopy data-base derived information products such as question/answer

services, selective dissemination of information and current awareness profiles. The PADIS Newsletter, DEVINDEX-AFRICA and directory of African experts will continue to be published. New data bases will be developed and existing ones modified according to the results of surveys of changing user needs.

33. Research on improved methodologies for statistical and non-numerical data base development will be undertaken. Specialized reports as well as guidelines for the utilization of the PADIS system will be published. Establishment of a fourth subregional documentation and information will be undertaken. To provide guidance for the network, the subregional and regional technical committees will continue to meet.